

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13

DHA-02 OMB-01 EB-08 TRSE-00 ACDA-07 /086 W

-----260311Z 045463 /63

P 260218Z JAN 77

FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1626

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SEOUL 0674

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PINS PFOR KS

SUBJ: RELAXATION OF CONTROL OF KOREAN NEWSPAPERS

REF: (A) SEOUL 0128, (B) SEOUL 0619

1. EVIDENCE APPEARS TO BE ACCUMULATING THAT ROK PRESS MAY BE ATTEMPTING ONCE AGAIN TO TEST ROKG'S DETERMINATION TO MAINTAIN DIRECT PRECENSORSHIP AND GUIDANCE CONTROL OVER NEWSPAPER CONTENT.

2. IN ADDITION TO WHAT WE HAVE REPORTED IN REFS, ROK PRESS OVER PAST WEEK HAS GIVEN PAGE ONE OR PLAY SPACE, FOUR-COLUMN HEADLINE, INSIDE TREATMENT TO A NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL STORIES DEALING WITH HUMAN RIGHTS, MOST NOTABLY INDIRA GHANDI'S RELAXATION OF PRESS CONTROL, RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS AND CALL FOR ELECTIONS PLUS CZECH CHARTER 77 MOVEMENT. IN ADDITION TO SINDONGA ARTICLES REPORTED SEOUL 619, JOONGANG MONTHLY HAS CARRIED RATHER LENGTHY TWO-PAGE STORY ON DEMOCRATIZATION IN SPAIN. WEEKLY CHOSUN HAS FEATURED FULL PAGE ITEM UNDER HEADLINE READING "STRUGGLES FOR HUMAN RIGHTS SPREADING ALL OVER EASTERN EUROPE." ALSO CARRIED FULL TEXT OF CHARTER 77.

3. USIS PRESS AND GOVERNMENT CONTACTS REPORT THAT NO OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE HAS BEEN GIVEN WHICH WOULD ENCOURAGE SUCH TREATMENT OF SENSITIVE STORIES. THESE SOURCES STATE THAT
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EDITORS ARE DISCUSSING PLAY AND TREATMENT OF THESE STORIES AMONG THEMSELVES IN AN EFFORT TO SEE HOW FAR GOVERNMENT WILL PERMIT THEM TO GO BEFORE CRACKING DOWN AGAIN.

4. IN ADDITION TO RELATIVELY PROMINENT PLAY AND TREATMENT OF STORIES INVOLVING HUMAN RIGHTS AND INDIAN GOVERNMENT MOVES, OTHER USIS SOURCES HAVE CALLED OUR ATTENTION TO FACT THAT A

NUMBER OF PROFESSORS FIRED FOR POLITICAL REASONS DURING LAST YEAR'S REVIEW AND WEEDING OUT OF TENURED ACADEMICS HAVE BEEN APPEARING MORE FREQUENTLY AS THE AUTHORS OF PIECES IN MAGAZINES AND NEWS-PAPERS WHICH ARE EXPLICITLY OR IMPLICITLY CRITICAL OF GOVERNMENT. MOST NOTABLE OF THESE "POLITICAL PROFESSORS" NOW REAPPEARING IN PRINT ARE HAN WAN-SANG, FORMER PROFESSOR SOCIOLOGY AT SNU, AND LEE YOUNG-HEE, OF HANYANG UNIVERSITY. THEY AND SEVERAL OTHER LESSER LIGHTS ARE WRITING FOR QUARTERLIES, MONTHLIES AND EVEN DAILIES. ONE SOURCE TELLS US THAT LEE HAS BEEN ENCOURAGED BY EDITOR OF A GOVERNMENT-SUBSIDIZED MAGAZINE TO WRITE "EITHER WAY HE WISHES," I.E., PRO OR MILDLY ANTIGOVERNMENT. SO FAR ANTI-GOVERNMENT WRITINGS OF THESE ACADEMICS HAVE BEEN DESCRIBED TO US AS "RATHER MILD."

5. SINCE EARLY JANUARY, ACCORDING TO OUR PRESS MONITORS, CENSORSHIP OF JAPANESE NEWSPAPERS ARRIVING IN SEOUL HAS VIRTUALLY CEASED. SUCH PAPERS AS ASAHI AND YOMIURI ARE SELLING IN SEOUL WITH ANTI-ROKG STORIES LEFT UNCENSORED. WE HAVE ALSO BEEN TOLD THAT ROKG HAS REDUCED CENSORSHIP OF SENSITIVE STORIES FROM AMERICAN PUBLICATIONS SUCH AS TIME, NEWSWEEK, WALL STREET JOURNAL, AND NY TIMES. ALTHOUGH THIS APPEARS TO BE CASE, MAGAZINES HAVE NOT RECENTLY CARRIED MANY STORIES THAT WOULD CLASSIFY AS PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE.

6. ONLY RECENT CASE OF ROKG PRE-CENSORSHIP WE ARE AWARE OF IS KCIA TELEPHONED INSTRUCTIONS TO DAILY EDITORS TO REFRAIN FROM PLAYING UP HUMAN RIGHTS STATEMENTS IN PRESIDENT CARTER'S INAUGURAL WITH SPECIFIC REQUEST THAT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMENTS NOT APPEAR IN HEADLINES. HOWEVER, FULL TEXT OF PRESIDENT'S INAUGURAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

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"WORLD NATIONS" SPEECH DID APPEAR INTACT. ONE SOURCE, EDITOR OF MINOR SHINA ILBO, STATES THAT IN ONLY RECENT CASE OF GOVERNMENT PRESS GUIDANCE WE AWARE OF, KCIA ON JAN 22 INSTRUCTED EDITORS TO HOLD EVEN "INOFFENSIVE" HEADLINES ON INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STORIES (INDIA, CHARTER 77, CHILE, ETC) TO TWO COLUMNS. NO INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN TO DISCONTINUE CARRYING THESE ITEMS.

7. LOCAL PRESS REPRESENTATIVES, FOR MOST PART, TELL US THAT KOREAN PRESS HAS INDEED EMBARKED ON ONE OF ITS TRADITIONAL PERIODS OF TESTING GOVERNMENT DETERMINATION TO MAINTAIN RIGID CONTROLS

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1627

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OVER MEDIA CONTENT. THEY ARE ENCOURAGED IN THIS BY PRESIDENT CARTER'S CAMPAIGN AND INAUGURAL STATEMENTS ON MORALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS, FEELING THAT GOVERNMENT DOES NOT WISH RISK HARSH CRACKDOWN ON PRESS UNTIL NEW AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION'S ATTITUDES TOWARD KOREA ARE MORE CLEARLY DEFINED. THEY ALSO POINT OUT THAT SPRING IS COMING AND THAT KOREAN NEWSPAPERS HAVE HISTORICALLY TRIED TO AT LEAST APPEAR TO LEAD STUDENTS IN MOVEMENTS OF DISSENT RATHER THAN OTHER WAY AROUND. IN 1975 STUDENTS GOT THE JUMP ON PRESS, WHICH WAS SOURCE OF CHAGRIN FOR PRESS. AT SAME TIME THEY POINT OUT THAT GOVERNMENT HAS ALWAYS ENCOUNTERED SWIFT AND CONCERTED OPPOSITION FROM BOTH PUBLISHERS AND PRESS WORKING STIFFS IN COMBINATION WHEN THEY HAVE TRIED TO SQUELCH INTERNATIONAL STORIES ON DISSENT WHICH ALL PAPERS THROUGHOUT WORLD ARE REPORTING WITH IMPUNITY. GOVERNMENT, OUR SOURCES SAY, WISHES TO AVOID KNOCK-DOWN DRAG-OUT FIGHT ON CENSORSHIP WITH MANAGEMENT AND WORKING JOURNALISTS ARRAYED AGAINST THEM AS HAS HAPPENED IN PAST AND WHICH HAS ATTRACTED ATTENTION OF WESTERN JOURNALISTS COVERING SEOUL. SHINA SOURCE PROFESSES TO SEE LITTLE CHANGE IN SITUATION.

8. COMMENT: OUR BEST GUESS IS THAT GOVERNMENT IS TRYING TO RELAX CONTROLS A BIT, PROBABLY WITH ONE EYE ON WASHINGTON AND ANOTHER ON JAPAN, AS SUGGESTED BY LIFTING OF CENSORSHIP ON JAPANESE NEWSPAPERS.

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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